We claim:

Sub A1

1. A method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles based on cross-matching of corresponding want data to profile data, comprising the steps of:

compiling a database of registration records each identifying and describing actual characteristics of an entity;

compiling a query record describing desired characteristics of an entity, said query record including a plurality of incremental preference rankings associated with said desired characteristics;

matching said actual characteristics with said desired characteristics by assigning a score for each match that is weighted in accordance with said preference ranking;

totaling said scores to prioritize the closest registration records based on said query record.

2. The method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles according to claim 1, wherein said step of matching said actual characteristics with said desired characteristics further comprises assigning a score for each non-match that is weighted in accordance with said preference ranking.

3. The method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles according to claim 1, wherein said database of registration records identify and describe actual characteristics of people, and said step of compiling a database of registration records further comprises prompting

successive users to each enter a profile of objective data identifying and describing themselves by a series of online forms presented to said users by a computer.

4. The method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles according to claim 3, wherein said step of compiling a query record describing desired characteristics of an entity further comprises prompting a user to enter subjective data identifying and describing their wants by a series of online forms presented to said user by a computer, plus prompting said user to enter a subjective preference ranking associated with each want data element to indicate importance thereof.

5. The method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles according to claim 4, wherein said step of compiling a query record further comprises prompting a user to enter subjective data identifying and describing their wants by a series of online forms displaying a range of discrete choices for each data element, plus a range of user-selectable preference levels for each data element.

6. The method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles according to claim 5, wherein said user-selectable preference levels further comprise at least seven discrete preference levels substantially corresponding to "must", "strongly want", "want", "don't care or no preference", "don't want", "strongly don't want" and "must not be".

7. The method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles according to claim 5, wherein said user-selectable preference levels are assigned numerical values.

8. The method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles according to claim 6, wherein said user-selectable preference levels are assigned numerical values.

9. The method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles according to claim 8, wherein said assigned numerical values are as follows: "must"=1, "strongly want"=2, "want"=3, "don't care or no preference"=4, "don't want"=5, "strongly don't want"=6 and "must not be"=7.

10. The method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles according to claim 8, wherein said step of matching said actual characteristics with said desired characteristics by assigning a score for each match that is weighted in accordance with said preference ranking further comprises assigning a maximum score for each positive comparison of query data with profile record when said preference ranking is equivalent to "must" or "must not be".

11. The method for matching one set of wants with a database of profiles according to claim 10, wherein said step of matching said actual characteristics with said desired characteristics by assigning a score for each match that is weighted in accordance with said preference ranking

further comprises assigning a minimum score for each positive comparison of query data with profile record when said preference ranking is equivalent to "don't care or no preference".

12. An automated system for matching a set of desired subjective characteristics to a most suitable profile of actual objective characteristics from among a database of such objective profiles, comprising:

a database of profile records each comprising a collection of data elements describing actual objective characteristics of an entity;

a succession of computer forms navigable by a graphical user interface for prompting a user to enter a query record describing desired characteristics of an entity, said query record including a plurality of incremental preference rankings associated with said desired characteristics;

a computer software matching engine for scoring the conformity of the query record of desired characteristics with said profile records of actual characteristics based on correspondence of said data records as statistically weighted by said preference rankings, said matching engine then totaling said scores;

an output display for displaying a list of profile records that conform to said query record in prioritized order of the matching engine score.

13. The automated system for matching a set of desired subjective characteristics to a most

suitable profile of actual objective characteristics according to claim 12, wherein said computer software matching engine assigns a numerical score for each match that is weighted in accordance with said preference ranking.

14. The automated system for matching a set of desired subjective characteristics to a most suitable profile of actual objective characteristics according to claim 13, wherein said computer software matching engine assigns a numerical score for each non-match that is weighted in accordance with said preference ranking.

15. The automated system for matching a set of desired subjective characteristics to a most suitable profile of actual objective characteristics according to claim 13, wherein said profile records each identify and describe actual characteristics of people.

16. The automated system for matching a set of desired subjective characteristics to a most suitable profile of actual objective characteristics according to claim 15, wherein said query records include subjective data identifying and describing a user's wants plus a subjective preference ranking associated with each want to indicate importance thereof.

Sub A3

17. The automated system for matching a set of desired subjective characteristics to a most suitable profile of actual objective characteristics according to claim 17, wherein said succession of computer forms prompts a user to enter subjective data identifying and describing their wants

by displaying a range of discrete choices for each data element, plus a range of user-selectable preference levels for each data element.

18. The automated system for matching a set of desired subjective characteristics to a most suitable profile of actual objective characteristics according to claim 17, wherein said user-selectable preference levels further comprise at least seven discrete preference levels substantially corresponding to "must", "strongly want", "want", "don't care or no preference", "don't want", "strongly don't want" and "must not be".

19. The automated system for matching a set of desired subjective characteristics to a most suitable profile of actual objective characteristics according to claim 17, wherein said user-selectable preference levels further comprise at least seven discrete preference levels.

20. An online matching method, comprising:

prompting each user to enter a personal profile comprising information describing actual characteristics of the user, characteristics desired by said user, and incremental preference rankings associated with said desired characteristics;

matching said actual characteristics with said desired characteristics by assigning a score for each match that is weighted in accordance with said preference ranking;

totaling said scores to prioritize the closest registration records based on said query record.